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**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1999 Employee Survey Improvement Strategy**

**Employee Job Satisfaction: Building on a Strong Foundation  
March, 2000**

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**OUR COMMITMENT TO THE EPA WORKFORCE**

At its most basic and best level, EPA is its people. Be they supervisors or managers, scientists or engineers, support professionals or any of the hundreds of occupations of employees working at the Agency, they achieve the mission. EPA has achieved its best results when the Agency has recognized this principle and has capitalized on it. As stated in the Agency's human resources strategic plan, we are committed to an EPA that . . . respects and values competence, innovation, diversity of cultures and thinking, continuous learning, and sound science. We need a workplace that broadly supports these values and the people who embody them.

I am gratified that the results of the 1999 National Partnership for Reinventing Government Survey confirm that the key to EPA's success has been the distinctly positive relationship EPA staff have with their organization. EPA remains committed to making that relationship even stronger. EPA is doing well and wants to do better.

W. Michael McCabe  
Acting Deputy Administrator  
March, 2000

**EPA IS DOING WELL**

Working for over 28 years to protect public health and the natural environment, EPA's workforce has produced results apparent in the food we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe everyday. The findings documented in the 1999 Employee Survey confirm what EPA staff have long recognized as fundamental to their record of success: talented, involved, valued, and committed professionals who understand the Agency's mission will achieve it.

A review of the Survey's findings establish the depth of this most basic EPA operating principle. Seventy-seven percent of EPA respondents to the survey expressed satisfaction with their jobs, 17 percent above the Government-wide figures. Fully 83% of the EPA respondents give high ratings to the quality of the work produced in their work units, 11% above the rest of the Federal government and on par with the private sector. Similar results are registered in the areas of managerial communication of organizational mission, the extent to which employee opinions are valued, electronic access to information key to job success, and teamwork. Clearly, EPA has a solid foundation of staff job satisfaction on which to build.

The Survey's results focus attention on three areas where more work is most needed.

- (1) EPA staff rate the Agency in need of a well-defined system for linking customer feedback and complaints to employees who can act on the feedback.
- (2) In a similar vein and despite a distinctly positive overall view of the quality of work produced at the Agency, only 17% of the respondents feel that corrective action to deal with deficient employee performance is taken when needed.
- (3) Finally, in keeping with uniformly low Government-wide opinions of the Federal hiring system, EPA staff also overwhelmingly rate the system as unsatisfactory.

Even greater levels of employee job satisfaction -- and corresponding mission results -- depend on addressing the issues staff identified in these three areas.

## **STRATEGY FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT**

### ***(1) Linking Customer Feedback to Employees Who Can Act on It***

EPA recognizes the need to improve the way the Agency obtains and uses feedback (including complaints) and links it directly to employees who can act on it. There are two types of feedback at EPA: solicited and unsolicited. Solicited feedback includes surveys, feedback cards, focus groups, web site requests, and other intentional requests for feedback. Unsolicited feedback includes correspondence, phone calls, visits by individuals to EPA, and other types of feedback initiated by the agency's customers. EPA is currently taking several steps to improve the feedback it solicits and to enhance the ability of employees to act on all types of feedback.

EPA has recently issued feedback guidelines, *Hearing the Voice of the Customer - Customer Feedback and Customer Satisfaction Measurement Guidelines*, to help EPA staff throughout the agency solicit and use various types of feedback most effectively. To accompany these guidelines, we have established a feedback advisor training program and have begun to create a small but growing cadre of advisors who can assist their colleagues. During the coming year, we will hold two-day workshops to certify additional

advisors in the use of the feedback guidelines. In addition, we will sponsor four one-day workshops familiarizing regional and state staff with the Customer Service in Permitting Tool Kit. This Kit has a strong feedback and satisfaction measurement component. We will also hold special training sessions on the use of survey software, as well as half-day workshops and advisory sessions to build agency awareness about feedback. Further, EPA plans to establish a surveys data base to keep track and share what we learn from feedback with employees who can act on it.

EPA has initiated several efforts to improve how it makes use of unsolicited feedback. We have established a National Correspondence Tracking Information Management System (NCTIMS) for controlled correspondence and a system to track comments and complaints on our web site. We also have smaller systems within program offices used to track customer service comments and complaints. In addition, we have evaluated an Ombudsman complaints system and other software systems for handling Agency complaints.

The Agency will encourage managers at all levels to link feedback directly to those whose work it impacts, and to reward individuals and programs for obtaining and using customer feedback to improve products, service, and processes.

The agency will evaluate its feedback training, systems, and incentives to determine progress and the need for further improvements.

**(2) *Corrective Action to Deal with Employee Performance***

Over the last three years, EPA has overhauled its employee performance management system. The former system -- paper-driven and with little focus on teams -- forced supervisors to make meaningless distinctions among various staff members performance at the expense of productive dialogue. Two-way performance exchange between a supervisor and an employee, focusing on specific ways an employee can develop and grow on the job, is the key to the new system. Based on the Survey s data and other feedback, it is apparent that supervisors need to place renewed emphasis on their responsibilities to initiate and follow through on this dialogue as a first step in correcting performance issues. The following steps will be taken to work toward this objective.

- " The Agency s supervisory and managerial development curriculum will be designed to emphasize the importance of effective performance feedback in the structure of EPA s employee performance management system, providing specific instruction on productive approaches to focusing performance issues and providing action-oriented feedback.

- " EPA s supervisors and managers will also be prepared to use rewards, recognition, and promotional opportunities to reinforce exemplary performance such as innovation, creativity, and acting as a change agent.
- " EPA s Headquarters Career Resources and Counseling Center will design and conduct employee workshops aimed at the crafting and implementation of useful individual development plans.
- " EPA senior management will issue timely notices to managers reinforcing the central role effective performance feedback plays in the performance management process and reminding managers of their responsibilities to conduct productive feedback sessions regularly.

**(3) *Helping Navigate the Federal Hiring and Recruitment System***

It is cumbersome, complex, and sometimes inexplicable, but most of it is mandated under current law. The it is the Federal hiring process and EPA, as most Federal agencies, must work within its framework to administer the merit competition required to hire staff. Staff in EPA human resources offices recognize the dilemma as important to their customers -- which they define as all Agency employees -- and as a significant contributor to the Agency as an employee friendly place to work. Even as the human resources offices understand they must comply with the law, they also know they can help potential employees through the process as easily as possible by helping them understand what to expect. Specific initiatives include:

The Agency is working with its union partners to streamline the EPA merit promotion process, aiming to remove any cumbersome processes that are not required under statute.

Headquarters human resources staff communicate with their customers as soon as a request for a human resources action is received, acknowledging receipt of the request, committing to a specific date for the action s completion, and then tracking and regularly reporting on the status of all of the requests received. The goal is to take the mystery out of the timeframes associated with the human resources system.

The Agency will issue guides for program managers to help them understand the available hiring and recruitment authorities and resources, and provide tips on how to effectively speed the hiring process. The first of these guides, *The Manager s Tool Kit for Hispanic Recruitment*, will be distributed shortly, with others to follow.

The Agency will voice its strong support for flexible hiring authorities aimed at entry-level intern recruitment and work with other agencies and the Office of Personnel Management to make the broadest use possible of such authorities once issued.

***For more information . . .***

EPA's programs and governance structure feature several portals for the receipt of employee feedback and input. The Agency's Human Resources Council, composed of senior-level managers, establishes an agenda of human resources initiatives. The National Partnership Council, a primary vehicle for coordination of the Agency's collaboration with its labor union partners, also serves a rich source of information about the needs of employees and approaches to meeting those needs. The Customer Service Program, guided by the Agencywide Customer Service Steering Committee, develops and promotes customer service initiatives throughout the Agency.

For more information about these and other Agency programs and organizations, contact John Kasper in the EPA Office of Media Relations at 202-260-4355.